

## In Guaraní Lands: Paraguay as a Brazilian Tourist Destination in the Magazines and Newspapers of Brazil and Paraguay during the Stroessner Era

En tierra Guaraní: Paraguay como destino turística brasileira en las revistas y diarios de Brasil y Paraguay durante la época de Stroessner

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**Abstract:** The regime of Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989) hoped to attract Brazilian tourists to Paraguay. This was a dramatic change from attracting Argentine tourists in the early twentieth century. This article argues that while the government desired Brazilian tourists, there was limited information for potential Brazilian tourists to access in Brazil and in Portuguese. Nevertheless, it is possible to reconstruct some tourist destinations and activities for Brazilian tourists from Brazilian newspaper and magazine articles, a few surviving copies of a Portuguese-language tourist guide to Paraguay, *Carta del Paraguay*, and technical reports. This article argues that while Brazilians had little interest in travel to Paraguay, some did make the journey to their neighboring nation and most likely enjoyed the attractions and destinations suggested by the press.

**Keywords:** Paraguay; Tourism; Brazil; Stronism; Magazines.

**Resumen:** El régimen de Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989) pretendía que los turistas brasileños viajaran a Paraguay, lo cual fue un cambio drástico respecto a lo que ocurría a inicios del siglo XX, cuando el país contaba con turistas principalmente argentinos. Este artículo explica cómo, a pesar de que el gobierno stronista deseaba fomentar la llegada de turistas brasileños, hubo falta de acceso a información turística sobre Paraguay en Brasil, y en lengua portuguesa. Aun así, a través del análisis de revistas y diarios, es posible reconstruir algunos de los destinos turísticos y actividades recomendadas para turistas brasileños en Paraguay, gracias principalmente a unas pocas copias de una guía turística en portugués que sobrevivió (*Carta del Paraguay*), y algunos reportes técnicos. El artículo desarrolla, fundamentalmente, que aunque hubo poco interés por parte de los brasileños por viajar a Paraguay, algunos sí hicieron el viaje y, lo más probable, disfrutaron de las atracciones y destinos sugeridos por la prensa.

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**Palabras clave:** Paraguay; Turismo; Brasil; Stronismo; Revistas.

## 1. Introduction

On October 3, 1953, a few months before the coup that would put Alfredo Stroessner in power in Paraguay, the magazine *O Cruzeiro* published a letter from a reader, Antônio Ferreira. He wrote to the magazine requesting information about travel to Paraguay. He wanted to know where he could find information about a tourist agency that could help him plan a sojourn to the neighboring country. The reply he received from the magazine was brief and relatively unhelpful – as it detailed no specific information about Paraguay at all. The magazine noted that newspapers from the town which the reader resided could be able to provide information. The reply did not point to any specific material about an agency or advice beyond reading the local paper<sup>1</sup>. This short retort to an inquiry about travel to Paraguay is unsurprising. Although the dictatorial regime of Alfredo Stroessner sought to encourage travel from Brazil to Paraguay, the Brazilian press provided limited information about what to expect from travel to Paraguay in the middle decades of the twentieth century. While articles and advertisements for travel to the neighboring country occasionally appeared in Brazilian dailies, the information they offered was not usually in-depth and was surprisingly modest.

During the middle decades of the twentieth century, Paraguay embarked on a new era of friendship with Brazil. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, relations between the two nations were marred by memories of the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) and the occupation of Asunción by Brazil until 1876; but, by the middle decades of the twentieth century and the rise of Alfredo Stroessner, these feelings of hostility were waning<sup>2</sup>. The two nations also shared similar political realities in the later decades of the twentieth century as they were both under dictatorship: Paraguay from 1954-1989 and Brazil from 1964-1985. As a result of the newfound peace between Brazil and Paraguay and similar styles of government, the Paraguay tourist industry hoped that Brazilian travelers would soon flock to Asunción to take advantage of relatively cheap goods and handicrafts, enjoy the city's comfortable new hotels, and see the beauty of the “Guaraní lands”<sup>3</sup>. However, the reality was that even though some

<sup>1</sup> Letter to the editor, *O Cruzeiro*, October 3, 1953.

<sup>2</sup> For more, see: Chesterton, Bridget María, “From Porteño to Pontero: The Shifting of Paraguayan Geography and Identity in the Early Years of the Stroessner Regime”, in Blanc, Jacob and Freitas, Frederico (eds.), *Big Water: The Making of the Borderlands between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2018, pp. 247-249.

<sup>3</sup> This is not dissimilar to what Jesús Nicolás Torres Camacho found in his study of tourism during the dictatorial regime of Francisco Franco (1939-1975 in Spain. According to Torres, “during the dictatorship, the Ministry of Information and Tourism experimented with intense activity, especially in the decades of the 1960s [with the hopes] that tourism would develop into a key engine in the development of the nation and the graduate economic

Brazilians did come to Paraguay, the idea of tourism to Paraguay for Brazilians was always that it was an exotic location with little to offer a visitor during the decades of Stroessner's rule. Nevertheless, it was with great eagerness that Paraguayans began awaiting the expected throngs of Brazilian tourists. The Paraguayans hoped to bring in *Cruzeiros* via Portuguese language pamphlets and advertisements designed to be read by future Brazilian vacationers in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

English-language academic studies of tourism in Latin America have been the realm of anthropologists. Works by scholars such as Florence Babb have considered “the myriad ways in which transitional Latin American and Caribbean nations have looked to tourism as an industry that may further agendas for change, whether through economic advancement or political repositioning vis-à-vis other nations”<sup>4</sup>. Histories of tourism in Latin America have focused on either North American tourists or Spanish-speaking tourists who were enticed to travel to exotic locations. Dennis Merrill focuses on how the tourist industry in the United States often mimicked larger imperial projects of the country<sup>5</sup>. It was hoped that these tourists would become an industry that could buoy the larger economies of many countries. Studying Machu Picchu, the historian Mark Rice considers how “locals and their global allies made modern Machu Picchu... [and the role] tourism has played in creating national symbols in the twentieth century”<sup>6</sup>. This article complicates these narratives by considering Latin American (or the hope for specifically Brazilian) tourists fostered ideas concerning national development vis-à-vis a growing middle class in Brazil that sought international travel<sup>7</sup>. The scholarship thus far has failed to see Latin Americans as middle-class international tourists in their own right. This article corrects that oversight<sup>8</sup>.

Studies of tourism in Brazil have generally focused on recent trends and the growth of a Brazilian middle class that has the funds and the desire to know their country. As pointed out by Dalila Müller, et al. “starting with the beginning of the 1970s, Brazil lived through the so-called ‘Brazilian economic miracle’ when the economy of the country grew at an accelerated rate... Because of such growth, it attracted a great deal of both national and international investment....

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progress”. Ver: Torres Camacho, Jesús Nicolás, “Ruptura y continuidad en las imágenes y eslóganes turísticos del franquismo: Castilla-La Mancha como estudio de caso”, in Travé Molero, Raúl and Milano, Claudio (coords.), *De dos orillas: imagen y experiencia en el turismo*, Tenerife (Spain), PASOS: Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural, 2019, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Babb, Florence, *The Tourism Encounter: Fashioning Latin American Nations and Histories*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Merrill, Dennis, *Negotiating Paradise: U. S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Rice, Mark, *Making Machu Picchu: The Politics of Tourism in Twentieth-Century Peru*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2018, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the development of a Brazilian middle-class see: Owensby, Brian P., *Intimate Ironies: Modernity and the Making of Middle-Class Lives in Brazil*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999; and Woodard, James P., *Brazil's Revolution in Commerce: Creating Consumer Capitalism in the American Century*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Brazil as a destination for tourism has also received attention from scholars. Patricia de Santana Pinho considers how African American tourists in Brazil have longed to understand their heritage and “yearn to experience African culture firsthand and meet other black communities”. See: De Santana Pinho, Patricia, *Mapping Diaspora: African American Roots Tourism in Brazil*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2019, p. 1.

Some of which was investment in tourist infrastructure”<sup>9</sup>. Studies of Brazilian tourists’ sites, including coffee plantations and the city of Blumenau have offered ideas into how Brazilians experienced their country since the 1970s and 1980<sup>10</sup>. The 2013 edited volume by Celso Castro, et. al. explores how both Brazilians and Europeans experience Brazil as tourists<sup>11</sup>. However, these studies failed to study Brazilians as international tourists in foreign lands. Seeking to see Brazilians as international tourists, this article contributes to our limited understanding of Latin American middle-classes as tourists prepared to spend money and sightsee in foreign lands.

This article narrates the story of tourism by considering various Paraguayan and Brazilian newspapers and magazines. In particular, the article pays attention to how the Brazilian press, occasionally viewed Paraguay as an object of curiosity and a possible tourist destination. I balance this perspective with the idea that Paraguayans particularly desired the arrival of Brazilians in their country because they were looking to increase revenue and develop better international relations with their large neighbor.

## 2. Dreaming of Tourists

As noted by the Paraguayan historian Claudio Fuentes Armadans, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, most international tourists arriving in Paraguay were Argentine. He writes that the Argentine magazine *Caras y Caretas*, noted that Paraguay was a luxurious and fashionable destination for Argentines of a certain class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century<sup>12</sup>. Looking to escape the winters in Buenos Aires, Argentine tourists arrived in Paraguay hoping to take advantage of the mild winters<sup>13</sup>. These Argentine tourists also came for “health reasons”; in particular, individuals who were suffering from “rheumatism and tuberculosis... [came] looking for a warmer climate”<sup>14</sup>.

Decades later, one of the major hopes of the Stroessner regime was that tourists would flock to the country<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, much effort was devoted to developing Paraguay as a tourist

<sup>9</sup> Müller, Dalilia, Hallal, Dalilia Rosa, Gomes Ramos, Maria da Graça and Morales Garcia, Tania Elisa, “O Despertar do turismo no Brasil: A década de 1970”, Conference proceedings entitled, in *Tourism and Management Studies*, 2 (2011), p. 693.

<sup>10</sup> Silva Silveira, Adalgiso, Rejowski, Mirian, “Turismo nas fazendas imperiais do vale do Paraíba Fluminense”, in *TuryDes: Revista Turismo y desarrollo local* (2016), pp. 1-13; and Rické, Audrey, *Oktoberfest in Brazil: Domestic Tourism, Sensescapes, and German Brazilian Identity*, Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Castro, Celso, Lima Guimarães, Valeria and Montenegro Magalhães, Aline, *História do turismo no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, FGV Editora, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Fuentes Armadans, Claudio, “La relación económica centro-periferia de Argentina-Paraguay según la revista ‘Caras y Caretas’ de Buenos Aires (1898-1914)”, Universidad Nacional de Asunción, M.A. Thesis, 2019, p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90.

<sup>15</sup> According to Andrew Nickson the Stroessner regime can be divided into three eras. The first is a “consolidation” (1954-1967), “expansion” (1968-1981) and finally a “era of decomposition” (1982-1989). These eras represent the different economic programs of the era. The “expansion” era is the time when Paraguay and Brazil began

destination. The Paraguayan government held conferences to increase the visibility of the Paraguayan tourist industry, constructed hotels, highlighted the many amenities for improving accommodations and attractions in Paraguay, and advertised businesses to tourists in local papers and magazines during the middle decades of the twentieth century. The administration hoped these efforts would appeal to international tourists, specifically Brazilians, who would fill the Paraguayan coffers. As noted in an editorial in the travel magazine *Guaraní*, “It is the truth... that our country [Paraguay] urgently needs to powerfully move the precarious tourist industry to reach the level achieved by other nations in the region”<sup>16</sup>. It is impossible to know what number of tourists or from what nations the magazine was comparing Paraguay to. However, it is possible to imagine Argentina and Brazil earning the most attention from tourists, which the author referenced.

However, for the Brazilian press, “Paraguay was not a tourist destination”<sup>17</sup>. Paraguay was too far off the beaten trail and hard to explore, and there were relatively few activities to enjoy. This attitude posed a problem for the Paraguayans and President Stroessner, who, according to the Brazilians, was quite interested in expanding “the industry of peace”<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, there was at least some reason for hope about the future of tourism in the country. According to the Brazilian press, the Paraguayans were busy developing a tourist industry under the direction of a new Minister of Tourism that, in the next ten years, “could be one of the best in Latin America”. While such an optimistic evaluation was based on relatively little evidence, the article did continue to highlight some of the more important tourist attractions of Asunción and its environs, including, but not limited to, the Ypacaraí Lake (Ipacaraí Lake in Portuguese), the Jesuit ruins located in Encarnación, the pilgrimage site of Caacupé, and, in Asunción proper, the “botanical gardens” and the “zoo” were listed as some of the more exciting and engaging tourist attractions in Paraguay<sup>19</sup>.

In three surviving issues of the magazine *Carta del Paraguay*, published in Portuguese for a Brazilian readership, the magazine claimed that it had a circulation of over “20,000”. It was “at times, exhausted in less than a week”. Encouraging Brazilian subscribers was one of the magazine’s primary goals. In the June 1976 issue, *Carta del Paraguay* printed an announcement that read in part, “If you are interested in regularly receiving ‘Carta del Paraguay’ through the mail, you should send us your full name, ID, address and zip code, accompanied by Cr\$ 20,00, to cover the cost of shipping. In April, August [,] and December, we will hold a lottery with the

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negotiations and construction of Itaipú dam. See: Nickson, Andrew, “La Caída de Alfredo Stroessner y el ocaso del sultanismo”, in *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, (2020). This large-scale energy project shaped relations between the two nations; the two nations developed a new friendship. As noted by Mladen Yopo H. before the rise of Stroessner, “Paraguay was practically a satellite of Argentina”. However, in the years after the rise of Stroessner, “the balance [of power in the region] clearly shifted in favor of Brazil. This was possible because of the phenomenal boom in the Brazilian economy”. See: Yopo H., Mladen, *Paraguay, Stroessner: La política exterior del régimen autoritario, 1954-1989*, Santiago de Chile, Editorial KIPUS 21, 1991, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>“Editorial”, *Guia Guaraní* 2, 22 (1962), p. 2.

<sup>17</sup>“O turismo no Paraguai”, *Correio de Manhã*, August 14, 1958, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibidem*.

winner receiving a trip to and from Asunción completely free... Participate!”<sup>20</sup>. The magazine editors hoped and believed that circulation and readership would increase the visibility of Paraguay as a tourist destination in Brazil. Whether the magazine landed in the hands of Brazilians is impossible to know, but the dream was undoubtedly alive and well.

One of the reasons that the magazine hoped to have excellent circulation, even in Brazil, was that it was a “free magazine” financed through advertising. This advertising was designed for Brazilian tourists interested in visiting the country and gives insight into what they can expect in Paraguay. The magazine carried advertisements for restaurants, including “El Jardín de la Cerveza” or the well-known “Talleyrand”, which encouraged readers to “write us and win a free trip to Asunción”<sup>21</sup>.

In 1976, the magazine announced the “semana nacional do turismo” in Paraguay, which was “dedicated... to festivals, bull runs, expositions, visits to churches, museums and libraries, the election of a queen of tourism, typical foods, [and] folk music”. The week, which began on the festival of Corpus Christi in 1976, not uncoincidentally a national holiday in Brazil, was a time when Brazilians were likely to have time off to visit Paraguay and enjoy the extensive list of activities planned for the ten days following the religious holiday throughout the country including Paraguay’s smaller towns in Pirebebuy, Yaguarón, and Quilndy<sup>22</sup>.

In the mid-1960s, the Paraguayan popular cultural magazine *Ñandé* published an article on a conference held in Asunción with the leaders of the Brazilian town of San Leopoldo of the State of Río Grande do Sul, Brazil. The Paraguayan Director of Tourism, Alejandro Burgada Guanes, headed to Foz de Iguazú to meet with a delegation traveling from San Leopoldo to show them the wonders of Paraguay. As the group headed west on the newly constructed highway that connected Foz de Iguazú with Asunción, they stopped for lunch in Campo 9 – almost the halfway point between the two cities. The Brazilian dignitaries were treated to “a typical Paraguayan meal with musical accompaniment”<sup>23</sup>. Later, upon their arrival in Asunción, the Brazilian guests were treated to a yacht tour of the Paraguay River”. The event organizers expected these sojourners would report home to Río Grande do Sul on the beautiful, exotic, and hospitable trip they had experienced in Paraguay, thus encouraging other visitors from Brazil’s most southern state.

One of the major attractions for international tourists was supposed to be Paraguay’s hospitable climate. Tourists were to enjoy the outdoors, just like the esteemed guests from San Leopoldo. They were expected to go on fishing expeditions, sailing tours, and other pleasant alfresco activities available in Paraguay.

<sup>20</sup> Textbox, *Carta del Paraguay* 2 (1976), p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Advertisement, *Carta del Paraguay* 2, (1976), pp. 2 and 6.

<sup>22</sup> “Semana nacional do turismo”, *Carta del Paraguay* 2, (1976), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> “La feria Brasileña y el la direccion de turismo”, *Ñandé*, Year VII, 143 (no date), p. 37.

### 3. Getting to Paraguay

In the early decades of the twentieth century, dense forests complicated travel between Paraguay and Brazil. Moreover, a large waterway, the Paraná River, impeded accessible vehicular transit to Paraguay. Until infrastructure could be built to overcome these obstructions, Brazilians had no easy way to make their way to Paraguay and its capital, Asunción. This drawback is similar to Andrew Grant Wood's writing about technology and tourism during the nineteenth century. He explains that "infrastructure opened the way for an expanding market in leisure travel" in Europe and the Americas<sup>24</sup>. Like railroads and steamships, a new highway and a bridge opened the opportunity for middle-class tourism to Paraguay by Brazilians a century later than in Europe and the United States. Combined, the forests and the river made travel overland from Brazil to Paraguay nearly impossible in the early decades of the twentieth century.

These physical barriers are highlighted in a Brazilian film that celebrates the construction of the Friendship Bridge that straddled the two nations. Travel to Paraguay did not become substantially less challenging until the construction of a highway connecting Asunción to the border in January of 1959 and the completion of a bridge over the river in 1965<sup>25</sup>. The undated film, most likely from the early 1960s, shows a perilous raft crossing of a barge across the Paraná River with a large commercial bus on board. The film's narrator states, "It had been like this: from São Paulo to Asunción on a barge: a total adventure". This "adventure" meant that the "ultimate obstacle [once the bus had safely crossed] had been passed and arrived in the land of Guaraní"<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, the film promised that tourists and visitors would soon "have more access to the [Paraguayan] capital" of Asunción<sup>27</sup>. The combination highway plus bridge meant that buses and autos would easily cross the Paraná River for the first time. After completing these projects, there were dreams of throngs of Brazilian tourists headed toward the border via private transportation on a schedule that reflected the convenience and preferences of the driver and the passengers.

Also fundamental to the ease of travel to Paraguay from Brazil was that by the late 1950s, even before the completion of the so-called Friendship Bridge, the two nations had come to an accord about making travel between the two nation-states easier with the signing of an agreement that let tourists from either country travel with greater ease and flexibility. According to a newspaper report in *O Jornal*, the two nations came to an agreement that "desired to increase exchange of tourists, and keeping in mind the desire to increased friendship between

<sup>24</sup> Wood, Andrew Grant, "Introduction", in Wood, Andrew Grant (ed.), *The Business of Leisure: Tourism History in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2021, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> See: Chesterton, Bridget María, "From Porteño to...", *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Sin Autor, "Inauguração da Ponte da Amizade, Brasil-Paraguay. YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnyWeEVzg7U&t=298s>

<sup>27</sup> Bejarano, Ramón César, *Vías y medios de comunicaciones del Paraguay (1811-1961)*, Asunción, Editorial Toledo, 1963, pp. 150-151; "El Gran Puente Internacional: Escenario del Encuentro", *La Tribuna*, March 27, 1965.

the two people, and also for the betterment of knowledge between the two nations” Paraguay and Brazil agreed to new measures that allowed for crossing between the two nations with simply a valid passport or ID card. The agreement determined that individuals could stay up to sixty days in the visiting country for tourism<sup>28</sup>.

In June 1972, the *Suplemento da Revista Automóvil Club* noted that driving to Paraguay was entirely possible and even enjoyable. Noting the distance from Curitiba to Asunción, broken down into sections, for example, from Curitiba to Ponta Grossa was 107kms, and the distance from Coronel Oviedo to Caacupé in Paraguay was 77kms, with a total distance from Curitiba to Asunción being a total of 1,028kms. Moreover, the article noted, “Paraguay is not the ideal place for your vacation, but if you are looking for a place [that is] . . . restful, colorful, and [in] constant contact with nature, Paraguay will completely satisfy you”. While it is unclear what the writer meant by not being the ideal “vacation” destination, readers could assume from the context that Paraguay does not offer much entertainment or possibly that it is missing the famous beaches for which Brazil was/is so famous. Instead, Paraguay offers a peaceful encounter with nature, and as such, “Asunción is always full of natives [doing] their activities and women dressed in typical clothing”<sup>29</sup>. In other words, Paraguay offered the “exotic” to visitors. If one was looking for less luxury and more “native”, Paraguay was the perfect destination for Brazilians who wanted to explore the unusual. Rather than encouraging everyone to visit Paraguay and Asunción, it was more for the adventure seekers of Brazil.

Of course, there were faster ways of traveling than by automobile or bus; air travel to Paraguay was also possible. In 1963, the Paraguayan state airline *Lineas Aereas Paraguayas* (LAP) promised service from Brazil to Asunción. The plan promoted in the Brazilian newspaper *Diario do Paraná* boasted that “the beginning of the operations of the LAP in Brazil is more proof of the growing progress for the Guarani nation [and] is one step closer toward the integration between Paraguay and Brazil”. The article also highlighted the modernity of the airplane in service, noting that it was a new and comfortable aircraft<sup>30</sup>. LAP also advertised in *Carta del Paraguay*, promising that “for our Brazilian brothers, our service starts with a smile, continues with the best onboard service[,] and ends with the certainty of arriving on time”<sup>31</sup>. A small announcement in the newspaper *Jornal do Comercio* (Rio de Janeiro) noted that LAP was “return[ing] to normal operations to Brazil with two flights weekly from Asunción to São Paulo”. What exactly had caused the interruption of service between São Paulo and Asunción was not noted in the article, but what is more important was that service had been returned. The article also announced a special “tourist fare” “with a discount of approximately 30%

<sup>28</sup> “Incremento do turismo entre Brasil e Paraguai: Convênio”, *O Jornal*, September 13, 1958, p. 8.

<sup>29</sup> “Roteiro Turístico e Rodoviá Turístico”. *Suplemento da revista automóvil club*, Year I, 8 (1972), N/P.; LAP – the state-owned airline - began operations in August of 1963. This airline “competed directly with LAPSA (see below) in that both airlines flew to the same locations”. Sapienza Fracchia, Antonio Luis, “La Historia de Lineas Aéreas Paraguayas, Asunción, Talleres Gráficos de AGR S.A., 2004, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> “LAP inicia hoje operação unido Brasil e Paraguay”, *Diário do Paraná*, 15 October 1963, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Advertisement, *Carta del Paraguay*, July 1976, p. 3.



for a period of 17 days”, most likely in an attempt to recover lost revenue and passengers after the interruption<sup>32</sup>. Later, LAP held a press conference for “several Brazilian journalists, particularly those covering tourism, to encourage them to visit Paraguay”. The executives at LAP hoped to show “the new realities of [Paraguay] in the [tourism] sector”<sup>33</sup>. What precisely those “realities” were was left to the readers’ imaginations. A more explicit article highlighted “a special trip organized by Lineas Aéreas Paraguayas (LAP), to Asunción, by distinguished personnel of the various [international] consular services in São Paulo accompanied by their families and assistants, to tour the Paraguayan capital, visiting its principal tourist attractions... [and conducting] a visit with General Stroessner”<sup>34</sup>. On a more expansive note about LAP later in the year, *Jornal do Comércio* noted that LAP, along with the Department of Tourism in Paraguay, was holding a promotional event that included a round-trip ticket to Asunción from São Paulo to celebrate the New Year. The trip, with a duration of four days, was to cost approximately 305 US dollars [the price was printed in dollars] and included a hotel stay at the “Hotel Casino Ita Enramada, located on the margins of the Paraguay River”<sup>35</sup>. Paraguayans engaged with Brazilians to encourage travel to Paraguay through discounted tickets or by encouraging journalists and consular officials to come to know the country on their own. In addition, sponsored promotional events were occasionally highlighted in Brazilian newspapers. However, these announcements were often on the margins of the paper and were not all that common in the Brazilian press.

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<sup>32</sup> “Voos S. Paulo-Assunção”, *Jornal do Comércio*, November 29, 1972, p. 2 (Segundo Caderno).

<sup>33</sup> “No Mundo Dos transportes”, *Jornal do Comércio*, June 17, 1977, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> “Lineas Aéreas Paraguayas”, *Cidade de Santos*, May 3, 1973, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup> “Excursão aérea ao Paraguai nos planod da LAP”, *Jornal do Comércio*, October 3, 1977, p. 1.



**Figura 1.** Advertisement for LAPSA, *O Mundo Ilustrado*, June 16, 1963, II, no. 233, June 16, 1963, n/p.

Even less common were advertisements for airline companies that served Brazil. Nevertheless, we were able to locate one such advertisement in *O Mundo Ilustrado* in 1964 for the privately Paraguayan-owned (and at least partially Brazilian-capitalized) LAPSA airline<sup>36</sup>. The Portuguese-language advertisement encouraged tourists to “Fly better [;] fly on LAPSA [;] “know the romantic PARAGUAY and its lovely songs [;] [with flights] from Rio, São Paulo and Curitiba to Asunción, Montevideo, and Buenos Aires on Tuesdays, Thursdays[,] and Saturdays[.]”<sup>37</sup>. LAPSA was in service from 1960 to 1965 when the state-owned LAP took over the company. During its short life, LAPSA clearly made at least some effort to connect with the Brazilian tourists through the popular press.

<sup>36</sup> Sapienza Fracchia, Antonio Luis “La Historia de..., *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Advertisement, *O Mundo Ilustrado* II, 233 (June 16, 1963), n/p.

#### 4. Economical and Luxury lodging in Asunción

While the article about driving to Paraguay included listings for hotels in Paraguay, including a rather extensive list of hotels of varying price ranges, including the Hotel Guaraní (to be discussed below), the article did not mention campsites. However, an article in *Diário de Paraná* suggested traveling to Asunción and staying at an inexpensive campsite for 40.000,00 cruzeiro novo per night in 1970 (about 7 US dollars)<sup>38</sup>. According to the article, “a camper only needs a vehicle, the rest depending on their possessions”. For Brazilians, one of the attractions of Paraguay was that it was economical. One did not have to worry about the price of goods and services in Paraguay as they were deemed reasonable in the Brazilian press. However, one of the significant problems with engaging with Brazilian tourists was the lack of luxury hotels in Paraguay. In the late 1950s, the Brazilian papers noted, “Asunción had one of the most precarious hotel industries that the paper had observed”<sup>39</sup>. More specifically, the paper noted that hotels of first class did not exist in Asunción and that the best hotels in Paraguay were only comparable to “third category” hotels in either Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo. However, the paper noted that by the early 1960s, Asunción would have had one of the most luxurious hotels in all Latin America. Although the article did not name it, the Hotel Guaraní (as it would later be known) was being constructed in the “center of the city” with new and modern amenities such as “a swimming pool and social facilities”<sup>40</sup>.

The Hotel Guaraní was a modernist project in downtown Asunción, a public investment owned by the public-private entity Instituto de Previsión Social (IPS). Designed by the Brazilian architects Adolpho Rubino Romer, Ruben Carneiro Vianna, and Ricardo Sievers it was hoped that the hotel would “foment tourism” in the country<sup>41</sup>. With modern comforts such as ensuite bathrooms and air conditioning, the hotel was designed to welcome the modern and jet-setting 1960s tourists to the heart of the South American continent. The building reflected Paraguay’s larger push to adopt more Brazilian and modernist design and architecture in a city that had previously been either colonial or Italianate in style<sup>42</sup>.

One of the hotel’s first and most prominent guests was Queen Elizabeth’s husband, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who arrived, supposedly piloting his own aircraft from Brazil to Asunción. If the hotel were suitable to welcome Europe’s nobility, it was undoubtedly of sufficient quality for Brazil’s middle-class tourists, who the Paraguayans hoped would spend a

<sup>38</sup> “Agora o turismo Será mais Fácil: Vá, em Breve, ate Assunção Acampando”, *Diário de Paraná*, January 20, 1970, p. 6; Methods of conversion found at <https://www.historicalstatistics.org/Currencyconverter.html>, accessed on February 19, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> “O turismo no Paraguai”, *Correio de Mañhã*, 14 August 1958, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> “Una gran obra digna de un gran gobierno y de una gran institución”, Archive of Instituto de Previsión Social (I.P.S.), p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Gutiérrez, Ramón, *Evolución urbanística y arquitectónica del Paraguay 1537-1911*, Asunción, Ediciones Comuneros, 1983.

few tranquil days or weeks at the hotel. The magazine *Manchete* told its readers that the Hotel Guaraní was “monumental” in that it had 13 floors and 200 rooms, all “with refrigerators and telephones”. The magazine also noted that the hotel was more “like a small city rather than a simple hotel”, highlighting that the building contained “shops, bank branches, a tourist agency, movie theater and night club”. Lamentably for the Paraguayan tourist industry, the Brazilian press did not comment on the opening of the Hotel Guaraní, nor were we able to locate any images of the building in Brazilian newspapers or magazines. Occasionally, the hotel would be mentioned as a place to stay in Asunción. Nevertheless, the Hotel Guaraní was a structure built of white marble” designed to impress even the finickiest of travelers<sup>43</sup>.

#### 4.1. Sightseeing in Paraguay

The question remained, even once one had arrived in Paraguay and located a place to reside for a few days, what to do? This question was addressed in 1961 by a Brazilian who toured the country with his wife. Humberto Didonet, who documented his trip to Paraguay in the Brazilian press, noted, “Paraguay is on a path to progress”. He wrote that the airport would “incentivize Paulistas (residents of São Paulo) to travel to Paraguay” and that most notable was a trip to San Bernardino on the shores of Lake Ypacaraí, where the waters were lovely. He did not recommend “Paraguayan food”, noting, however, that there were good juices, “apple, pineapple, and orange”, and that the food at the Lido Bar located in the city “opened his appetite after the trials of travel”<sup>44</sup>. The article also included photos illustrating some places a tourist could visit. One image shows a group standing around the lake, enjoying an enchanting view. In contrast, another shows the Cathedral in Caacupé, and a third is an image of the cemetery in Asunción. When taken together, these images highlight some of the activities undertaken by Didonet that might tempt future Brazilian tourists to come to Paraguay.

The lake and travel to Caacupé were also highlighted by a writer in *O Mundo Ilustrado*, who noted that “in the time of religious holidays approximately three hundred thousand people travel” to Caacupé to take part in the most prestigious center of religion in all of Paraguay”. This article also noted that pilgrims from all over the region, including Brazil travel to Paraguay to take part in the celebrations. Tourists could also spend time in San Bernardino and the “marvelous lake”, where “Paraguay’s richest and most prestigious families have come to build country homes on the margins of the lake”<sup>45</sup>. The article also noted “other bucolic aspects of San Bernardino that will call the attention of tourists” including its old – but comfortable – hotel.

<sup>43</sup> Viera, Milton Suplick, “Panorama visto da ponte -un nôvo Paraguai”, *Manchete* 559, January 5, 1963, p. 83.

<sup>44</sup> Didonet, Humerto, “Tomada Assunção de pijama”, *Jornal do dia*, March 2, 1961, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Hollanda, Haroldo, “Paraguai dorme velado pela placidez dos carros de boi”, *O Mundo Ilustrado*, 40 (September 27, 1958), p. 8.

San Bernardino was the topic of a two-page spread with photos in the magazine *O Cruzeiro* in 1974. The magazine noted that while many Brazilians were vacationing on the Lake, there were “more Argentines”. The magazine, however, noted with enthusiasm that even though there was an abundance of Argentines, “there are [also] so many *Paulistas* [residents of São Paulo] walking by the lake[:] one is given the impression of being at the dam Santo Amaro” located in the suburbs of São Paulo. It is clear from the article that Portuguese-speaking tourists made their presence and nationality known, even if Argentines outnumbered them. The article also mentioned the availability of hotels in around the lake, including the Hotel La Cordobesa, which had a “capacity of only 30 guests”, at the economical price of 800 Guaranies (48 Cruzeiros.)” More than just listing the prices of hotels, the article also noted the many activities one could partake in around the “enchanted beauty of Ypacaraí Lake. These diversions included sailboat competitions and swimming”. Pictures of the crystalline lake take up more space in the spread than text, highlighting the visual beauty of the lake. In one photo, a couple is photographed under a thatched umbrella enjoying the views of the lake, and in another photo, a young boy is holding a football with the lake in the background under a sign that reads: “Dogs not allowed”. The photo’s caption of the photo reads, “Dogs – as the sign explains – are not allowed on the shores of the lake. This is so that children can add the charms that their age brings to the enchantment and beauty of the lake”. Thus, the article adds that the Paraguayans were determined to keep the tranquility and pristine appearance of the lake by banning dogs while, at the same time, noting that this location makes for a lovely family vacation<sup>46</sup>.

One of the other major tourist attractions in Paraguay for Brazilians, and one often highlighted in major magazines in the middle of the twentieth century, was the Maká, an indigenous tribe from western Paraguay (the Chaco). The Maká were brought to Asunción by the White Russian Juan Belaieff, who worked for the Paraguayan military during the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay (1932-1935). Belaieff had successfully argued to the Paraguayan military that using Indigenous scouts would allow the Paraguayans to gain an advantage over their Bolivian adversaries: the region’s native peoples would better understand the disputed region and its terrain. With the aid of Maká scouts, the Paraguayan military gained an advantage over the Bolivians. However, with the end of hostilities, Belaieff feared that the Bolivians might take revenge against the Maká. As a result, he lobbied the Paraguayan government to bring the tribe to Asunción, where they would be safe. Eventually, the government placed the Maká at the Botanical Gardens in Asunción, where they would earn a living selling photographs and handicrafts to tourists<sup>47</sup>.

Visiting the Maká was highlighted various times in the magazine *O Mundo Ilustrado*, where the texts and photos exotified the women, and the “picturesque” nature of the community

<sup>46</sup>“Ipacaraí: O Sagrado lago azul”, *O Cruzeiro* September 25, 1974, pp. 44-45.

<sup>47</sup>For more on the Maká and their history in Paraguay, see: Chesterton, Bridget María and Isaenko, Anatoly, “A White Russian in the Green Hell: Military Science, Ethnography, and Nation”, in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, 4 (2014), pp. 615-648.

was highlighted. This narrative concerning the more “primitive” and indigenous aspect of Paraguay was part of the attraction of Brazilians in Paraguay. While noting that there were “very little opportunities for organized tours in the country”, *O Mundo Ilustrado* noted that visiting the Maká was not exceptional in this case. Nevertheless, it is apparent from the article that visiting the Maká was one of the high points of any trip to Paraguay. The article noted that visiting the Maká costs 50 Guaranies per person. A photo would cost the tourist “20 Guaranies for a single woman, 15 Guaranies for an engaged woman, and 10 Guaranies for married or widowed women”<sup>48</sup>. Commodifying women’s sexual history meant that these women were placed into Western standards of beauty to be enjoyed by a Brazilian tourist who knew the “value” of the indigenous female body. Images of bare-breasted women waving around bills. As noted by Joanna Ziarkowska, Indigenous people around the world “are not allowed to control their life narrative... the frame and composition are carefully controlled by the white artists [in this case, Brazilian tourists] who cater to the tastes and preferences of the privileged mainstream”<sup>49</sup>.

## 5. Shopping and Entertainment

Low prices are what attracted most Brazilians to Paraguay. According to *O Cruzeiro*, the Paraguayan government “imposes imputed tax on imported goods, allowing for a constant and intense commerce”. Moreover, the magazine noted, “With the purchasing power of Brazilian money (17 Guaranies for 1 Cruzeiro), Paraguay is virtually a paradise for us”<sup>50</sup>. As a result, over 15,000 tourists from Brazil entered the country in June 1974<sup>51</sup>. These tourists could then take advantage of good weather, a “peaceful environment, and inexpensive shopping”<sup>52</sup>.

In the August 1976 edition of *Carta del Paraguay*, the magazine teamed up with the whiskey Dandie Dinmont to give away a first-place prize of a round trip to Asunción and two bottles of whisky “imported directly from Scotland”<sup>53</sup>. This raffle underscored the notion that Paraguay, known for imported luxury goods at low prices (because of the low tax or smuggling),

<sup>48</sup> Torok, Jorge, “Pitoresca dos ‘Maka’ e dos ‘lengua’”, *O Mundo Ilustrado*, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Ziarkowska, Joanna, “Marketing Indigenous Bodies in the Fiction of Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrick, and Sherman Alexi”, in Fear-Segal, Jacqueline and Tillett, Rebecca (eds.), *Indigenous Bodies: Reviewing, Relocating, Reclaiming*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2013, p. 103.

<sup>50</sup> “O irresistível atrativo dos preços baixos mantém un fluxo commercial bem intenso”, *O Cruzeiro*, August 14, 1974, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> This is an important era in Paraguayan history as it is the beginning of the construction of Itaipú dam in eastern Paraguay. More and more workers were needed in the region, and Brazilians workers were attracted to this frontier region. For more on this, please see: Blanc, Jacob, *Before the Flood: The Itaipu Dam and the Visibility of Rural Brazil*, Chapel Hill, Duke University Press, 2019; and White, John Howard, “Prodigal Sons and Beardless Machos: Labor, Migration, and Masculinity at Itaipú, 1974-1980”, in *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 94, 4 (2014), pp. 649-679.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> “Concurso”, *Carta del Paraguay* 4, August 1976, p. 7.

would become a destination for Brazilians who sought imported European and American-made goods at low prices. Shopping soon became one of the primary reasons that Brazilians traveled to Paraguay. Noting this trend, the magazine *O Cruzeiro* published an article that highlighted “the attraction of low prices”. Publishing information from the “Statistical Bulletin of the Central Bank of Paraguay”, the article reported that the country imported 4,041,000 tons of whiskey in 1973 alone. *Carta de Paraguay* was tapping into a strong desire by Brazilians to acquire inexpensive but quality spirits. To emphasize the quality of the whiskey, the magazine noted that “in any store, you will find the best whiskeys at the best price”. Writing that the price of whiskey was between “35 and 50 Cruzeiros” but that one could also find whiskey at the low price of 29 Cruzeiros, the article explains to their Brazilian readership that good bargains were to be found in Paraguay<sup>54</sup>. A photo published in the magazine shows bottles on the shelf and large cases of whiskey that a traveler could take home to Brazil.

Also, Brazilian shoppers in Paraguay could find perfume and makeup at low prices. *O Cruzeiro* announced that French perfume could be found at one-third the price of that in Brazil. *Perfumerias* (stores that specialized in the sale of perfume and make-up) also placed ads in *Carta del Paraguay*. The “Centro Mundial do Perfume” (Global Center of Perfume), located in downtown Asuncion on Palma Street, trumpeted that they sold “international perfumes and cosmetics” of the highest quality. They wished the Brazilian tourists “a happy stay in our lands” and offered a 10% discount if the tourist brought in the advertisement<sup>55</sup>. Consequently, if they looked for deals, a Brazilian consumer with a coupon could find cosmetics at even lower prices than those celebrated by *O Cruzeiro*.

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<sup>54</sup>“O irresistível atrativo dos preços baixos”, 40; For more on the importance of illicit trade in Paraguay, including whiskey, see: Schuster, Caroline E., “The Bottlenecks of Free Trade: Paraguay’s *Mau Cars* and Contraband Markets in the Triple Frontier”, in *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, Vol. 24, 2 (2019), pp. 498-517. According to the newspaper *Jornal do Comércio*, whiskey sold in 1975 for 46 Cruzeiros a bottle in Brazil, while the cost of the bottle before taxes was 11.50 Cruzeiros. The article, like the one in *O Cruzeiro*, does not account for the quality of the liquor. “Em crise a produção de “Scotch”, *Jornal do Comércio*, December 2, 1975, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup>Advertisement, *Carta del Paraguay*, August 1974, p. 4.



*Figura 2.* Woman in store in Asunción with bottles and boxes of whiskey. The caption, in Portuguese, reads: “Besides whiskey, there is plenty of stock of [perfume] Le Gallon, Chanel, Nina Ricci, Carven, Schiaparelli, Christian Dior e todas as boas marcas de perfumes franceses, a preços baratíssimos”.

Cigarettes were another item popular with Brazilian tourists. Like whiskey, these goods were offered at much lower prices in Paraguay than in Brazil. As a result, *Carta del Paraguay* also contained advertising information about purchasing cigarettes in Paraguay. Marlboro’s ad noted (in Portuguese) that it was “the best-selling cigarette in the world” and encouraged users to “experiment and feel the difference”. While which cigarettes Marlboro was comparing itself to is not explicitly stated, the notion that “cheaper” and “better” cigarettes were available in Paraguay was certainly promoted to Brazilian shoppers and tourists<sup>56</sup>.

During the Stroessner era, dinner shows option became an attractive for tourists for evening entertainment. Numerous restaurants in Paraguay offer Brazilian tourists the opportunity to hear music and see dancing. Advertisements in *Abc Color*, the local Paraguayan paper, showcased “El Jardín de la Cerveza”, to attract both the “Paraguayan and International Public” to their new

<sup>56</sup> Advertisement, *Carta del Paraguay*, August 1974, p. 7



building located in the Villa Morra neighborhood of Asunción. The restaurant/theater promised the “best service and the best shows”<sup>57</sup>. “El Jardín de la Cerveza also advertised in Portuguese in *Carta del Paraguay*, encouraging readers to “attend the best artistic ‘show’” to experience “an unforgettable night in an enchanted garden”. The establishment also promised “the best tasting international and typical [Paraguayan] food”. Notably, the restaurant could handle larger tour groups because it had room for 500 people<sup>58</sup>.

The type of music and dancing that Brazilians could expect to hear included Guarania, a typical Paraguayan musical style, and dancing. *Carta del Paraguay* highlighted this type of music, declaring: “Guarania expresses the Paraguayan soul”. The magazine then gave the reader a history of the style and its “first” performer, José Asunción Flores. The article also published a small fragment of sheet music from one of Flores’s most famous Guarania, “Jejuí”. The article then reminded its readers that this style of music could be heard frequently at El Jardín de la Cerveza.

## 6. Numbers and Concluding Thoughts

The most dramatic way of understanding the lack of Brazilian tourists, however, is through numbers. In 1968, the Paraguayan government contracted with the consulting firm Latinoconsult to study the possibility of increasing tourism there. While the report mainly focuses on strategies for increasing tourism, the statistics offer insight into the volume of tourists arriving from abroad. According to these figures, between 1960 and 1969, 47 percent of the tourists entering Paraguay were Argentine. Only 27 percent were Brazilian<sup>59</sup>. In other words, Argentines entered Paraguay at almost twice the number of Brazilians. The report addresses how to attract more tourists but does not explicitly mention any strategies to encourage Brazilian tourists into the country. Even with the strong Paraguayan desire to encourage Brazilian tourism, not enough had been done to correct the fact that most tourists were still coming from Argentina and not Brazil, even in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

More work was needed to encourage the Brazilian tourists. Even cartoon artists poked fun at the limited opportunities for fun in Paraguay. In a cartoon published in the popular magazine *Ñandé*, a dispirited tourist, presumably an international one (maybe even a Brazilian), looks somberly at the various attractions of Asunción. In the first frame, the tourist visits the Panteón de Heroes (a shrine to Paraguay’s heroes in downtown Asunción); in the second, he visits the

<sup>57</sup> Advertisement, *Abc Color*, July 7, 1976, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Advertisement, *Carta del Paraguay* 1, 4, August 1976, p. 5. When I was 15 years old in August of 1989, I made my first trip to Asunción, with an Argentine bus tour. I was lucky enough to see one of these dinner shows in Asunción. I cannot recall at what restaurant I ate; I do remember long tables with large quantities of food and typical Paraguayan dancing, including musical entertainment. While I have not found any advertisements for bus tours from Brazil to Paraguay, I have found one for a plane trip to Paraguay. The tourist agency *Nova Miller S.A Turismo e Viagens*, planned a trip from São Paulo to Asunción with a layover at Iguazú Falls for a three-day tour. While certainly not heavily advertised in the Brazilian Press, these tour groups were the ones that the owners of “Jardín de la Cerveza” attempted to entice with their shows. Advertisement, *Jornal da orla*, March 16, 1975, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Latinoconsult, “Desarrollo del Turismo en el Paraguay” (March 1970), III. While the report lists the total number of tourists entering the country, it does not include specific numbers by nationality, only percentages. It is unclear if the percentages are derived from the total number of persons entering or if they are only estimates.

Hotel Guaraní and appears unimpressed; in the third, our unfortunate tourist observes the Maká at the Botanical Gardens; and, in the fourth, he stares unmoved at Lake Ypacaraí. In the final frame, he excitedly photographs the voluptuous “Miss Tourism” of Paraguay<sup>60</sup>.



**Figura 3.** In *Ñandé*, Year V, 109 (15 October 1963). Reprinted with permission from Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

This image, a type of self-denigrating humor at the available options for international tourism, was precisely the problem in attracting Brazilians in the middle decades of the twentieth century. For our intrepid Brazilian tourist who Antônio Ferreira mentioned in the

<sup>60</sup> Cartoon, *Ñandé*, Year V, 106 (5 October 1965), n/p. There are a variety of other ways to interpret this cartoon. A more mainstream interpretation would be that of the sexualization of Paraguayan women. A trope surrounds the exotification of Paraguayan women. This negative image was particularly prevalent in the early years following the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) when the country's population was almost entirely women and children. Tourists from Argentina would marvel at and sexualize the work women did in the country, particularly with their involvement in the sale of "a variety of goods, women who loaded oranges onto boats, and even women who labored in diverse activities including handicrafts and agricultural and ranching work". See: Fuentes Armadans, Claudio, "Mujeres a principios del siglo XX (1900-1932)", in Duarte Skell, Jazmín, Soto Vera, Anahí and Taboada Gómez, Victoria (eds.), *Más que gloriosas, Tomo I*, Asunción, Editorial Atlas, 2024 (Kindle Edition), p. 172. Also, see: Chesterton, Bridget María, "Between Yerba Mate and Soy: The Orange as National Food and Landscape from the Early-Nineteenth to the Early Twenty-First Centuries in Paraguay", in *Global Food History*, Vol. 8, 2 (2022), pp. 128-148.

opening vignette of this article, the realities of a vacation to the neighboring country were that it offered relatively little to entice Brazilians.